

CHEVALIER

Visits the Slums and Writes a Very Funny Song of the Bowery.

DAT'S STRAIGHT.

A NEW
SONG
WRITTEN BY
FOR THE
SUNDAY JOURNAL

CHEVALIER

THE FAMOUS
ENGLISH
COSTER
SINGER

AFTER A VISIT TO
WITH A JOURNAL REPRESENTATIVE

Written by Albert Chevalier.

Music by Alfred H. West,
Composer of "Our Court Ball"

Of course, everybody has heard of Chevalier, the English coster singer. His name sounds French, but he's British to the backbone.

Chevalier is a sort of a Lottie Collins, Tony Pastor, Jim Thornton, Sam Bernard and Yvette Guilbert all rolled up into one. He sings, capers about the stage, screws up his face and uses the funniest English dialect you ever heard.

Chevalier has devoted his life to a study of London "low life," and his songs are of these people, the costermongers and curious characters of the streets. Now it is entirely natural that almost as soon as he stepped off the steamer the other day Chevalier wanted to see something of New York "characters."

This yearning to study "New York's costermongers" (as Chevalier put it) was gratified by the Journal, and it fell to me to introduce the famous London singer to the Bowery, the dives, the East Side sports and to New York's "Chinatown." We made a night of it and Chevalier came home with a big book full of notes, which he had jotted down from time to time with huge delight.

So delighted, in fact, was Chevalier, that on his way back to his hotel in the early hours of the morning he dashed off the new song which is herewith reproduced. He rapidly scribbled the first stanza and a chorus and dedicated it to the Sunday Journal. I made a copy of it for Chevalier, and this he turned over to Alfred West, who writes the music for all the little coster singer's songs. Chevalier will write some more verses in a day or two, and then sing his new Bowery song as an encore.

THE FIRST VIEW.

Chevalier, Mr. West and myself entered the Bowery at Spring street, and it was apparent the view of this famous thoroughfare was a disappointment to the two men who thus saw it for the first time. In fact the glamour of evil which surrounds the Bowery in popular fancy belongs to the memories of other years, for the present condition of affairs is vastly different from that which obtained on the wide, yet dingy, street of long ago. The concert hall and the picturesque element of humanity known as the Bowery boy, are to-day the exception, rather than the rule. Thus this section of New York has been robbed of that individuality which formerly characterized it and made it famous on both sides of the ocean.

When I explained to Chevalier that the Bowery "had seen better days," he replied:

"That is not surprising. This movement that you call reform over here is going on in London, and, in fact, in all large European cities. Whitechapel is not what it was. In fact, if the Bowery were a trifle wider and if there were no elevated road, I could easily imagine myself in High street in Whitechapel."

Mr. Chevalier is not only of an inquiring and studious disposition, but he is gathering material for the inevitable book he is under contract to write, giving his impressions of America. Consequently, his queries were not only numerous, but interesting.

When I proposed a visit to a dime museum he was exceedingly curious as to what such an institution was like, and showed marked interest when it was explained to him that dime museums were the homes of artificial mermaids, Circassian girls, giants, dwarfs, famous persons so constructed as to create wonder, not only in the public mind, but even among subjects themselves, so carefully was all resemblance to the original concealed.

What interested Chevalier most was the glib-tongued lecturer, who, in gorgeous verbal pyrotechnics, described the truly wonderful objects on exhibition.

MUSEUM WONDERS SHOWN.

We passed a half hour in the miniature theatre connected with the museum, and although the "artists" were what the denizens of the Bowery term subjects for investigation by the Board of Health, Chevalier expressed surprise that talent of even such an approximately good quality could be enjoyed for the small sum of "tuppence ha'penny" a seat in addition to the admission charge.

"We have nothing like this on the other side, don't you know," said he.

"There are the palatial music halls, but they are all large and the prices of admission beyond the frequent reach of the common people. My word, the only institution in England that can at all be compared to the American Museum, is the travelling tent show that follows the fairs. This, I understand, is similar to your circus side show in this country, is it not?"

It was evident Chevalier was rather surprised, and a trifle disappointed at the non-appearance of the "Arrys," of the young coster and his-in England-ever present sweetheart, in the Bowery. The men and the women we saw were of the typical class, that the New Yorkers may see every evening he cares to stroll from Chatham square to Third avenue.

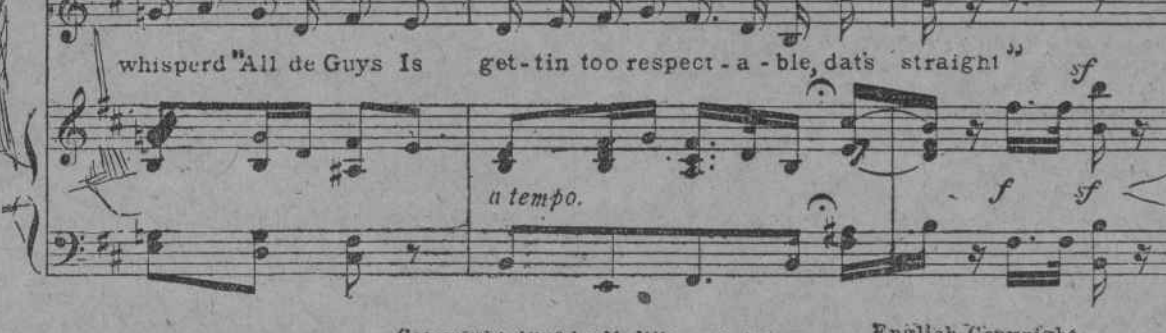
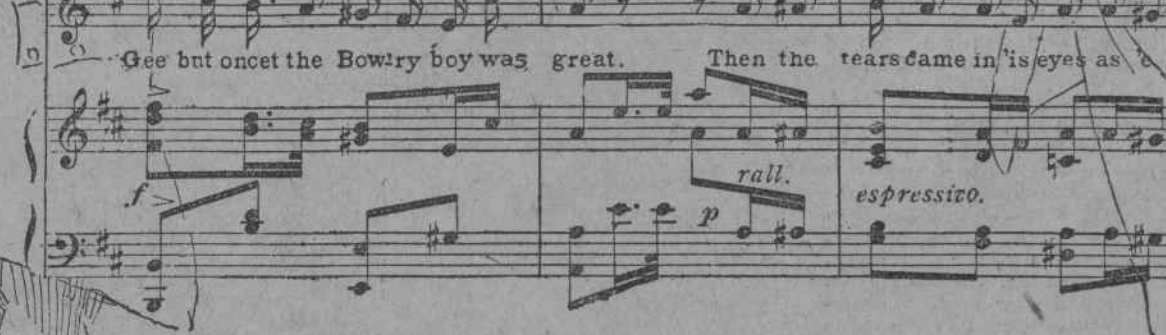
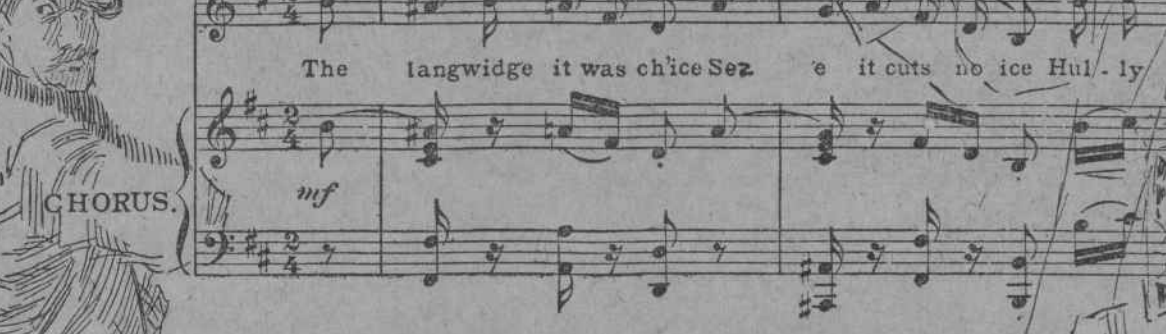
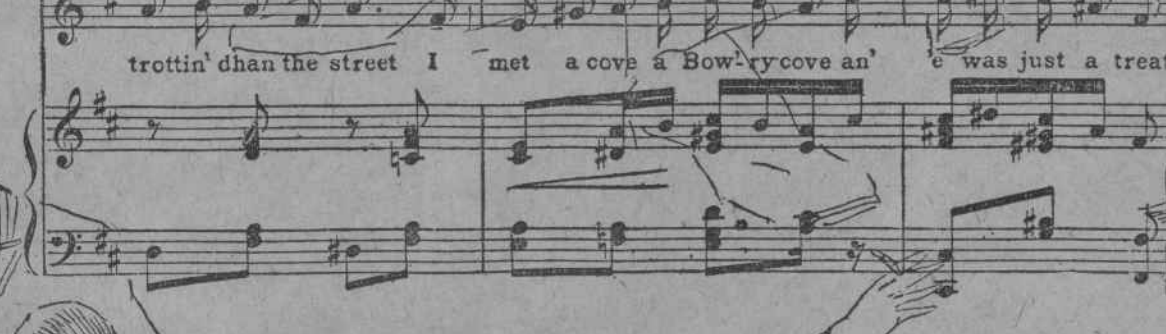
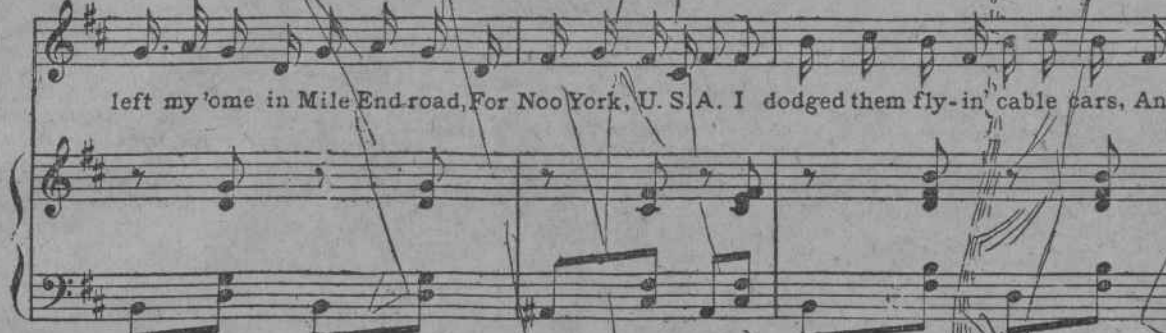
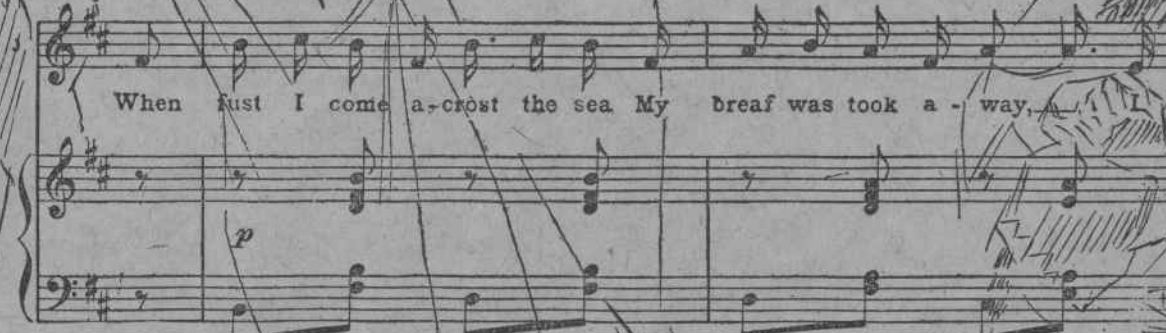
When it was told Chevalier that types of the life of which he sings not often seen on the Bowery, and that east side balls were the places for character study, the coster singer was amazed.

"The true coster," said he, "is the huckster. He sells all sort of perishable commodities, like fish, vegetables and fruit. He is a speculator in the true sense. Each morning early he goes to Covent Garden Market and buys his stock, which he loads into a barrow drawn by his little donkey."

HE'S RESPECTABLE.

"The coster is respectable as a type, and his distinguishing trait is his thrift. He is sporty and he 'speculates' at the Derby; he drinks, too, but he is not a drunkard. His distinguishing trait is his individual personality. What type have you here in New York that corresponds with him?"

"I fear there is none," was the reply. "On one hand there is the Bowery boy, who exists in a picturesque way only, in songs and in fiction. He is not known as a worker, except when he 'works' others, and it might be said to others to call him respectable. On the other hand, there is the local huckster. He is industrious, of spot, and he



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DAT'S STRAIGHT.

When fust I come acrost the sea, my brea'f was took away,

I left my 'ome, in Mile End Road, for Noo York, U. S. A.,

I dodged them flyin' cable cars, an' trottin' dhan the street,

I met a cove, a Bow'ry cove, an' 'e was just a treat.

CHORUS:

'Is langwidge it was ch'ice;
Sez 'e, "It cuts no ice,
Hully Gee, but onct the Bow'ry Boy was great."
Then the tears come in 'is eyes,
As 'e whispered, "All the guys
Is gettin' too respectable!—dat's straight!"

"speculates," but he is entirely lacking in that personality which makes the coster unique.

"Then if these two types could be made a composite character," said the Chevalier, "we would have the American coster."

The Hebrew theatres interested the Chevalier, and when informed only plays in Hebrew were produced he made an entry in his notebook to enjoy one of the matinees.

When he entered one of the largest and most respectable of the Bowery saloons, the free lunch proved a source of wonder. Interest changed to surprise when the Chevalier was told that the array of eatables constituted a "free lunch," and that one who drank could freely partake thereof. In England, he said, there was no free lunch, except that here and there in occasional public houses, a dish or two of eatables was furnished patrons.

"And what do you call a saloon?" he queried.

The best definition I could give was that a saloon was a drinking place where no food was sold. This bit of information was promptly jotted down in Mr. Chevalier's ever ready notebook.

THIS WOULD SEEM ODD IN LONDON.

The gaudy displays in the windows of the Bowery furnishing goods stores, and the places where all-wool "pants" are "made to order" (3 for \$3 caused the coster singer to pause frequently, and when he stopped before a window of a large florist he exclaimed:

"How strange a place like this would appear in Whitechapel!"

At the lower end of the Bowery we wandered into a concert hall. The hour was late, and the place was absolutely deserted except by the employees. We had been seated at a table near the door only a few minutes when a "lady" approached, and awaited only the faintest invitation to sit with us. We knew she was a "lady," for she made haste to assure us that she was a perfect specimen thereof.

This "lady" had a fondness for liquids that would have made the veriest Bacchante blush with envy, and, knowing that this desire might be thoroughly satisfied, the longer the "gents," as she termed us, stayed, she described in glowing terms the features of the programme that were to be presented.

The first of these was a song and dance by two Africans, of whose genuineness our olfactory organs assured us, and the "lady" said that the team consisted of man and wife. The turns were not half bad, and Chevalier was deeply interested.

"I say, are you a lady of the company?" he inquired of our entertainer.

The "lady" was at first overcome by the question, but in a moment rallied sufficiently to reply in the affirmative, and a bottle of wine which, however, never came.

The next visit was to one of the "Pure Kentucky six cents a glass whiskey" places.

"What is a schooner?" inquired Chevalier.

In reply I ordered one, but did not surround it. When my companions saw the mammoth glass on the bar their eyes opened wide in astonishment, and remarked that no glass of such colossal proportions were to be seen in London.

In strolling along Grand street a number of pretty East Side shop girls were seen. Chevalier scrutinized them carefully and declared that they compared favorably with girls in similar walks of life in England.

"Their faces are fully as pretty," said he, "and I really think that they dress with more taste than the London shop girls."

Continuing our walk down the Bowery we encountered a Chinese laundryman, and the interest he aroused caused a ready acceptance of an invitation to visit Chinatown. Presently we found ourselves in Doyers street, and here we met "Chuck" Connors, who more nearly than any other approaches the Bowery boy of fiction.

"Cert," said he, when asked to join our party. "Glad to be wid youse gents. Everybody knows me, and you'll be all right wid me. See?"

Thus reinforced we paid a visit to the joss house, a Chinese restaurant and other places of interest. At the joss house Chevalier and Mr. West burned joss sticks and listened attentively to "Chuck" Connors's vivid descriptions of the place. They drank tea at the restaurant, but firmly refused to eat chop suey and rice. They were, however, much interested in watching Mr. Connors manipulate the chop sticks and devour chop suey.

A REAL CHARACTER STUDY.

Chevalier was not long in realizing that in "Chuck" Connors he had encountered a character, and forthwith began to study him closely.

"Come on, Jack," said "Chuck" to the coster singer, "we'll hit up this joint," and we forthwith entered another Chinese restaurant.

"What does 'hit up' mean?" asked Chevalier, as we seated ourselves.

When I explained the term to him he asked the definition of "joint," and soon this entry was in his notebook:

Joint.—A place usually used in connection with a low public house, but sometimes used indiscriminately, slang.

Although "Chuck" is a fairly well informed man of the world, as he has seen it, he was ignorant as to Chevalier's personality. I tried to explain to him who his temporary "side partner" was, and that he was playing at Koster & Bial's.

"Thirty-fourth street? Why, Jack, I never goes above Canal street. Above dat street de langwidge changes. See?"

"Now, let's get a move on us gents," said "Chuck." "We'll do it up brown while we're at it."

And we did. In and out of the parlours that radiate from Chatham square, seeing all there was to be seen, peering into places where vice is king and virtue a stranger, we made our way, no incident being more notable than the rattling fire of comment with which "Chuck" entertained us. To "Chuck" Chevalier was an object of admiration. His intense interest and queer questions were taken as evidence that he was the "real stuff," and this is the highest compliment the Bowery can pay to any one.

After a while there began to be faint signs of gray in the East, and "Chuck" recollected an engagement. It was quite time we went home. All there was to be seen had been gazed upon. The indescribable odors with which the lower East Side teems at night had all been encountered.

"Jack," said "Chuck," as he said goodbye to the famous singer, "You're a peach!"

"Chuck," said Chevalier, "you're the most interesting young man I've met in America."

And so they parted.

J. E. R.